
An introductory overview of American national government: constitutionalism, political institutions and processes, and political behavior. Recommended for students who want a basic course in American government or who plan to take 200-level POLS courses.

**Catalog
Description**

This is an entirely online course; there will be no lectures. Even more than in college classes generally, *you* are responsible for *your own* learning and keeping up to date with reading and assignments. Your grade will be based on reading quizzes, your participation in discussion forums, a series of journals and other assignments including assignments on Congress, and a final essay exam.

**Instructor
Introduction**

This is a first course in American government. I have three main goals in teaching this course. First, I hope you will leave this class with some basic knowledge about the workings of the American political system. For many of you, this will be your only political science class and as citizens of the United States and as future business leaders, lawyers, government officials, scientists, dietitians and educators the knowledge that you gain will assist you in meeting your responsibilities as voters and professionals. In recent years, interest in American government has declined. Many Americans believe that politics does not affect their lives. Part of my job this semester is to convince you that you should understand and care about politics because it has a *remarkable* impact on your daily life. Second, and equally important, I hope that you will improve your ability to think about political subjects by investigating some serious and critical issues of American politics and government. You will hopefully know more about how government operates, but I hope you will also be able to evaluate for yourself how well it works. Finally, a few of you will go on to be political science majors. For you, this course will introduce basic concepts and methods that are central to the study of American politics and political science in general.

To meet these goals we will investigate the current state of American government and we will from time to time examine the events and ideas surrounding the founding of the American republic. The textbook emphasizes the theoretical foundations of our nation in addition to examining the current state of American politics. The text also tries to convince you that politics is relevant. In addition to reading a text, we will examine several essays written during the founding period, a few current articles from popular publications, and try to understand how a member of Congress thinks.

This course carries general education attributes for both General Education 2000 (Social Science — S2) and the previous general education requirements (Society and Human Behavior — S). As required I list below the SUNY Learning Outcomes for Social Science courses as defined by the SUNY Board of Trustees:

**General
Education
Attribute
Description**

Students will demonstrate an understanding of the methods scientists use to explore social phenomena, including observation, hypothesis development, measurement and data collection, experimentation, evaluation of evidence, and employment of mathematical and interpretive analysis; and knowledge of major concepts, models and issues of at least one discipline in the social sciences.

Office Hours: Primarily through ANGEL email. Unless it is an emergency, please use this to contact me. If you have a serious problem and I have not replied, email me at wilkerwr@oneonta.edu or if you have a real emergency call my cell phone, 518-369-0232.

I will check ANGEL email at least twice per day Monday through Friday unless I post a notice that I am away. On the weekends I will check less frequently.

All messages should include a subject and a signature.

I will set up a chat session in the first week. If it proves useful, we will continue them. See the calendar for day and time.

Office Phone: 607-436-3272 (I do not check very often in the summer.)
Department Phone: 607-436-3522 (The Department office is in Fizzle 419.)

**Class and
Instructor
Information**

Gizzi, Michael C., Tracey Gladstone-Sovell, and William R. Wilkerson. *The Web of Democracy: An Introduction to American Politics*, 2nd ed. Belmont CA: Wadsworth, 2007

**Book to
Purchase and
Other Reading**

This book is available at the campus bookstore (in the basement of Hunt Union) and at Damascene's Bookcellar (Corner of West & Cherry Streets) in Oneonta and on the Internet at all of the major book sellers.

Other reading will be made available in ANGEL, the course management software we will be using.

Students will also be required to sign up for free access to at least one of the following newspapers: *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Los Angeles Times*.

Quizzes

**Course
Assignments**

You will take a *Web of Democracy* quiz for each lesson. Questions will come from each of the twelve chapters that we will read in the textbook. These quizzes will have due dates noted in the lesson and on the calendar. **No late quizzes will be accepted with the exception of extraordinary circumstances.** Quizzes must be completed in a single 30 minute session, so you should read the chapter in advance. Each quiz will be available for roughly a week to accommodate your schedule. There will be a total of 150 multiple choice questions during the semester worth one point each and approximately 15 short answer questions worth 3-5 points each. In total, chapter quizzes will account for 220 points.

Discussion Forum Participation

There will be seven discussion forums during the semester; you must complete six, including the first one. You must tell me in advance if you are not going to participate in a forum. Some will focus on additional readings, others on concepts from the text or simulation assignments you are asked to complete. I will post an initial question and then act as a moderator only and intervene only to keep the discussion on track. Students will be expected to participate regularly in each forum. My initial post should only begin the discussion. *It is your discussion space, please take advantage of it by opening new threads and extending the discussion.*

Grading How much should you participate? I have no set number of posts, but once or twice per forum is not enough. Several substantial posts each forum is what I am looking for. You should check into and post on the forum multiple times during the time when the forum is open. If you are enjoying the forum, keep posting. Each forum will be graded separately and will be worth 30 points. In total discussion forums will be worth 18 percent of your course grade. Grading will be done as follows:

- 30: This grade is reserved for participation that shows a thorough and insightful consideration of the question and interacts with other participants in an outstanding way. It will show evidence of quality thinking.
- 25: Participation has been good in that it clearly answers the question posed and engages other participants. Shows that the reading has been done or that the concepts have been understood. Shows at least limited insight.
- 19: Participation shows only marginally satisfactory quantity and quality. Limited or not interaction with other participants. Little insight shown.
- 0: No meaningful participation or participation violates expectations for collegiality. All participation must respect others. While issues concerning topics such as race, gender, age and sexual orientation are part of politics, disparaging remarks about these and other immutable characteristics are not acceptable.

I will also set up a forum for general questions about the course, but this forum will not be graded. If I receive questions that I think will be of general interest to the class I will answer them in this forum.

Assignments

You will complete eight assignments during the course. These assignments will be connected to a specific lesson and be due on an approximately weekly basis. These assignments will be of three types: journals, learning about Congress, and presidential elections. Each assignment is worth 50 points. In total these assignments will account for 40 percent of your course grade.

The two journal assignments will require you to connect a concept or issue discussed in the text to the political events of the day. In each journal you will find a substantial article—at least several paragraphs long—published no more than 10 days from the date the assignment is opened on the

topic of the lesson in one of three major newspapers: *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Los Angeles Times*. In your approximately 250-400 word essay you should first summarize then article and then link the story to the lesson in some substantial way. The article might be an example of a concept or concepts from the text or other reading. Alternatively the article may challenge the reading you have done. For example, an article President Bush's approval rating might be linked to the discussion of how important public approval is to the success of the president found in the text.

You must include a link to the article you use as well as a complete citation. Unless approved in advance, your journal must be from one of the three publications noted above. I will ask you to write your journal in Word or another word processor and then copy and paste it into ANGEL.

Three assignments will require you examine what it is like to be a member of the House of Representatives and three assignments will allow you to investigate the 2008 presidential election and the presidential election system. The Congress assignments will lead you to the final exam where you will write a bill on the policy issue of your choice.

Grading Each journal or other assignment is worth 50 points. I will use a standard A through E format for these assignments. These guidelines refer specifically to the journal assignments, but will generally apply to the other assignments as well. A journals will provide a concise and clear summary of the article, describe the concept from the text or other reading that you seek to apply, and make the connection explicit using detailed examples from the article and text. The essay will be well written and show insight. B journals will still show at least good work in all areas—article summary, concept description, and connection. It may show only limited insight or have a modest deficiency in one area. C journals will have all elements, but only cover the required elements in a limited way. D and E journals will ignore portions of the assignment or be significantly deficient in one or more areas.

Comprehensive Essay Exam

Over the last week of the course you will be required to complete an essay exam in the form of drafting a bill. The purpose is to ask you to sum up and extend your Congress assignments. This exam will be worth 200 points, 20 percent of your semester grade.

Your semester grade will be based on the following graded assignments:		Final semester grades will be assigned based on the following point totals:				Grading Information	
Chapter Quizzes (9)	220	A	920 or above	C+	770–795		D+
Discussion Forums (6)	180	A–	896–919	C	720–769	D	620–669
Journals & Assignments (8)	400	B+	870–895	C–	696–719	D–	596–619
Comprehensive Essay Exam	200	B	820–869			E	below 595
Total Points	1000	B–	796–819				

A Note on Academic Dishonesty

Anyone cheating on any assignment will receive a grade of zero on the assignment and at the instructor's discretion, fail the course. All offenses will be turned over to College officials for action. Students should refer to the *Student Handbook* for more information on the College policy on academic dishonesty.

Students must do their own work on quizzes, journals, discussion and on the exam. Academic dishonesty is when one claims the work of others as their own work. It is ok to borrow ideas, but you must give the other person credit for them. If you have questions about how to cite or what to cite ask.

Policy on Makeups, Late Assignments, and Incompletes

Makeup quizzes will only be given in extreme circumstances. **Late assignments** will be accepted up to 3 days late with a 10 percent penalty for each day. **Incompletes** are strongly discouraged and will only be given if a student has completed a substantial portion of the course requirements. Students must request an incomplete grade. If an incomplete has not been pre-arranged, a grade will be calculated and assigned based on the work you have completed.

Other Rules of the Class

Course Outline, Reading, and Assignments

The course outline on the next page lists dates, topics, reading, and assignments. Detailed assignments will be placed on ANGEL. All chapter numbers refer to *The Web of Democracy*. Other readings are noted by title or author. And can be found in the appropriate lesson folder in ANGEL. While I will do my best to follow the course outline as described below, this outline is not a contract and it may be necessary to make changes.

Lesson Title	Read	Closing Date	Do
American Democracy: Then and Now	TWOD: ch. 1 & ch. 2 <i>Federalist #10 & #51, Mason</i>	T 6/3, noon	Quiz: ch. 1 & ch. 2 Assignment: Journal: choose a topic from ch. 1 or ch. 2 Discussion: on the founding debate
Federalism	TWOD: ch. 3	F 6/6	Quiz: ch. 3 Assignment: Learn About Congress: Thinking Like a House Member Discussion: legality of medical marijuana after completing the simulation
Congress	TWOD: ch. 9	F 6/13	Quiz: ch. 9 Assignment: Learn About Congress: Figuring out Who You Are as a Member of Congress
The Presidency and the Bureaucracy	TWOD: ch. 10 <i>Fisher</i>	F 6/20	Quiz: ch. 10 Assignment: Presidential Election: Investigate money and politics Discussion: How much power do presidents have to act alone in times of crisis? How much power should they have?
The Courts/Civil Liberties & Civil Rights	TWOD: ch. 11 & ch. 4 <i>Federalist #78</i>	F 6/27	Quiz: ch. 11 & ch. 4 Assignment: Journal: choose a topic on civil liberties and civil rights Discussion: complete the judicial selection simulation and discuss it and <i>Federalist #78</i>
Break for the 4th. Get assignments done before the holiday or wait until after.			
Public Opinion & the Media	TWOD: ch. 5 & ch. 6	F 7/11	Quiz: ch. 5 & ch. 6 Assignment: Presidential Election: investigate polling data on the 2008 presidential race
Political Parties & Interest Groups	TWOD: ch. 7 <i>Birnbaum, Messing</i>	F 7/18	Quiz: ch. 7 Assignment: Learn About Congress: Moving Your Agenda Forward Discussion: Based on your reading, are lobbyists good for our political system?
Elections & Political Participation	TWOD: ch. 8 <i>Wattenberg</i>	F 7/25	Quiz: ch. 8 Assignment: Presidential Election: examine the role of the electoral college Discussion: Should election day be a holiday? Discuss voter turnout
Public Policy	TWOD: ch. 12 <i>Class Matters, excerpts from the NY Times</i>	F 8/1	Quiz: ch. 12 Discussion: Does class and wealth have an impact on US politics? Should it?

Comprehensive Final Exam

Due: F 8/8 at midnight.